

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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(FOR KEY SEE REVERSE)

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SOURCE:

Prices and Supply of Commodities

1. Following is a list of commodities, which were being sold in Leningrad as of February 1953. All prices are approximate, since I can't remember the exact price of the various items. Some products do not have any prices listed under "Free Market", since they were always available in the government store, thus eliminating free market handling. Clothing and furniture were sold only in the stores.

Product	Quantity	Gov't Store (Price in rubles)	Free Market (Price in rubles)	Remarks
White Bread	kg	3.4	- - -	
Butter	kg	29-32 (70 in 1948)	- - -	
Beef	kg	14-17	14-20	
Pork	kg	16-21	16-25	
Veal	kg	- - -	18-25	Free market only
Sausage	kg	5 (the cheapest) 60-70 (best)	- - -	

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Chicken	kg	20	- - -	
Goose	kg	14-16	- - -	
Eggs	10	7-10	20	Free market only in winter
Sugar	kg	10-12	- - -	
Cocoa	100 gr	16.50	- - -	
Tea	50 gr	5-10	- - -	
Coffee	kg	54	- - -	
Rice	kg	11	- - -	None for the last three years
Oats	kg	5.20	- - -	
Flour	kg	2.60-7.40	10-12	Available in stores only before big holidays, but available in free market all year around.
Chocolate	100 gr	12-18	- - -	
Potatoes	kg	.9	1.20-2.00	Best potatoes in free market
Orange	1	4.50	- - -	
Lemon	1	4.50	- - -	
Sauerkraut	kg	1.20	7-9	Available only in free market for the last two years

Some articles varied in price according to the season. Fresh vegetables were available only in the fall.

Milk	liter		2.50-5.00	The price in the summer was 2.50 rubles. It gradually increased to 5 as winter came. The price in the store was always 50-60 kopeks cheaper, but in the winter it was available only in the free market.
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Cabbage	kg	6 (off season) 1 (in season)	
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Carrots	kg	.80	5.00
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Bed linens				Not available in the free market. Feathers were not sold anywhere.
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Mattress cover	1	120	
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Sheet	1	70	
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Pillow case	1	25	
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Pillow (with chicken feathers)	1	50	
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Bed cover 1 (with cotton batting)	240	
Man's shirt 1	80 (medium quality)	
Lady's hose nylon=caprone pair	50 (best) 25 (poorest)	
Man's hose pair	14 (best)	
Lady's fur coat	650 (cheapest) 1250 (medium) 10,000-15,000 (Persian)	seldom available
Lady's high pair galoshes	80-100	
Lady's high- pair heeled shoes	350-400	
Man's leather 1 coat	2,500-3000	
Man's hat 1	90-110	
Lady's hat 1 (similar to velvet)	140	
Lady's hat, 1 felt	60	
Lady's blouse 1 (with embroidery)	320	
Lady's blouse, 1 plain	220	
Leather belt 1	10	
Brassiere, linen 1	7	
cambric 1	10	
Radio, medium 1 quality	650	
Camera, Leica 3.5 lens 1	800	
Television 1 receiver (with radio)	2400	
Television 1 receiver	1200	seldom available
Automobile, 1 Pobeda	16,000	must be ordered one year in advance
Polished birch 1 bedroom set (2 beds, wardrobe, 2 night tables, vanity, hassock)	11,000	

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Typewriter	1	1200
Trunk, medium size, plastic	1	100
Notebook, plain	1	1
Pencil, common wooden)	1	1
Safety matches box		.15
Toothpaste tube		2.25

Curtains	In short supply; always immediately sold out.
Oilcloth	In short supply; always immediately sold out.
Ribbons, silk	In short supply; always immediately sold out.
Color fast embroidery yar	In short supply; always immediately sold out.

2. Any items which were in short supply were usually available on the free market at higher prices. Rarer items were always bought up and sold on the free market by speculators. Food was the main product handled on the free market, and I think much of it had been channeled around and away from government controls. Imported wares could be bought in the government stores. Leather shoes and shirts were imported from Czechoslovakia and Estonia. Oranges, bananas, etc. were imported from the Dutch colonies. We even saw pineapples from Mexico.
3. After a price reduction, several effects could be seen. If an item had been reduced in price, it would disappear in about two weeks from the market. A short time later, the item would reappear, changed in some minor detail, but at the old, higher, price. Groceries except for meat which stayed rather high really did have their prices lowered. After a price reduction took place, wages would also take a drop in many cases so that the price reduction was illusory. Of the Soviets that I spoke to, many hoped for the "good old times" of 1939-1940 when one had enough money from his earnings to take care of the necessities of life, and had enough left over for things like the opera and other little luxuries. The only comparison the average Soviet can make with his standard of living today, is to that preceding the war years. To say that they were dissatisfied would not state the case. It would be more exact to say that they were not completely satisfied. They all firmly believed that the day would come when everything would be better; this note of optimism was common to everyone. They all believed that the standard of living was not yet good enough, but that progress was being made.

Housing

25X1X⁴. [] had a two-room apartment with kitchen and bath. Heat and water were included in the rent, which was 170 rubles a month. The apartment had central heating and was always well heated. Electricity and gas were also paid for by the month; 25X1X electricity averaged 20, and gas 10, rubles a month.

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The condition of the apartments, 25X1X although they were in a new building, were poor. The windows and the doors were so poorly constructed that the wind could easily be felt in all the apartments. The wind even blew through the walls, tearing the wallpaper loose. We glued paper over the spots and jammed rags in the holes where the weather could find its way in.

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Although the building had been built in 1948, the apartment was in bad shape. When it rained, the water seeped through the ceilings. Half the tiles in the bathroom had fallen off. Hot water piping had been installed but never turned on; a laundry in the basement was never used. Furniture was not provided, but since we had bought [redacted] least had a nicely furnished apartment.

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5. The neighborhood in which we lived was made up entirely of new buildings. There were no single or two family houses, only apartment buildings. About 90 per cent of the apartments were subdivided so that there was one family per room per apartment. Cooking and sanitary conditions were, of course, very limited. Some few exceptions were allowed an entire apartment to themselves. Higher officers (colonel and above) and factory directors belonged to this group. They received this preference on two grounds; first, they belonged to the proper social stratum, and second, they were able to afford the space and the furnishings. No matter who the occupant was to be, the cost of the living space was so much per square meter. Those who obtained better living quarters, therefore, got them through their social standing. The ability to pay for the additional space and furnishings was secondary.
 6. The Soviets were always surprised when they saw how we lived. They considered their own living conditions poor. There was no envy, since they felt that anyone who lived that much better deserved it. We often heard the Soviets laud some other Soviet who had infinitely more. There was no jealousy, but rather pride that such a person could do so much for the State.
 7. There was no improvement in housing conditions while I was there. So many people were getting married that entire families in one room were still part of the everyday scene. In Leningrad, only large apartment houses were being built. It made no difference to what class a man belonged - worker, official, etc. - all were billeted in these apartment houses without discrimination. The only difference was in the accommodations given to an individual, as mentioned above. There might be four or five worker families in one apartment, and in the next apartment a high official might have it all to himself.

Health and Medical Conditions

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8. In each quarter of the city there was a polyclinic. There was one near our apartment building, as well as a prenatal clinic.

[redacted] There were 25X1X always enough physicians to take care of the normal influx of patients. Whenever an epidemic, such as influenza went around, the facilities were wholly inadequate. The physicians were mostly young women who were nothing more than medical technicians. The specialists, on the other hand, were mostly men who had their M.D. degree and were generally quite capable. In treating a patient, either in the clinics or at home visits, if the young physician was unable to deal with the trouble, then one of the more experienced specialists was called in.

Supply of Drugs

9. There were enough drugs available as far as we were concerned, but in having our prescriptions filled we discovered an interesting sidelight. When a physician prescribed 50,000 units of penicillin or some similar drug, the druggist would give 30,000 units. We believed that the extra 20,000 units which he had supposedly dispensed had found their way into other channels. That someone's life may have been in jeopardy was of no concern to these druggists in their struggle for a few extra rubles. The clinics were very primitive and had only the simplest instruments. The physicians were paid about the same as an ordinary worker. They often had two, or even three, jobs. It was very common for them to work one eight-hour shift at one clinic, and then another eight-hour shift in another clinic. When one of the 25X1X specialists' wives was hospitalized, a special case was made, and she was provided with a knife, fork and spoon, instead of only the usual spoon, to eat with. The general health of the people in Leningrad was good. I knew of no typhus, malaria, or tuberculosis. Influenza was the only prevalent malady. [redacted]

25X1X [redacted] The Soviets liked to eat raw onions, and, although

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they were expensive, encouraged their children to eat apples; I believe this is why we never heard of anyone having scurvy. I never saw any evidences of mental disorders. The Soviet men drank very much, but I cannot say that alcoholism was prevalent.

Wives and Family Life

10. Many of the Soviet women were not satisfied with their fate. Many would rather sit around in the parks and rest instead of working. The women had achieved 100 per cent equality, intellectual and physical. They might, and sometimes had to, do the same work as men. Both sexes were found in all occupations.
11. Since almost everybody had to work to make a living, there was very little family life. Usually a mother was out working all day and had little time to see her children. At an early age the children had to start worrying about their work in life. A young girl, therefore, was concerned primarily with learning a trade or a profession. The question of marriage could come about later, when the necessities of life were taken care of. Girls from families where the parents could afford to let their children have a little leisure and a chance for a better education did not have to worry so much about a career, so they could take time to find a husband. The tendency was for the women to marry within their class, i.e., a laborer with a laborer, or an engineer with an engineer. Trial marriages were not very frequent, but free love was. The married woman did not want to work, but often it was a financial necessity. Divorce was almost impossible; to get a divorce entailed so much money, red tape, and loss of work that it was beyond the reach of the average couple.
12. The kindergartens were well furnished by the State. The Soviet mothers were satisfied with these kindergartens. The children in these schools were frequently checked by the doctor and the dentist. I don't think the average mother liked being so dependent on these schools, since they had to agree on certain conditions, mostly about a child's education, in order for a child to be admitted. Since there was not too much room, all children were not admitted. Some parents had to pay a nurse to take care of their children, not because they could afford it, but because they would lose a position and chance for later work. A mother often worked just to pay such a nurse. Parents never educated their children contrary to the Party line, since such differences would soon show up and be traced back to them.

Social Strata

13. Directors and higher officers were given preferential treatment. They and Party members formed the "upper crust." Party members, however, were not as much in the foreground and we never heard too much about them. This upper social stratum was a rather stable one. They wore much better clothing, had complete apartments, or lived in separate districts, and were able to afford the things which the ordinary man could never hope for. The court and storybook manners were copied; it was not uncommon to see a man kiss a lady's hand. This was naturally copied by the masses. This "upper crust" could afford to send their children to the universities at their level, the State did not subsidize all students. There was not much friction between the workers and farmers and the intelligentsia. During celebrations and the like, each celebrated according to his means.

Minority Problems

14. I never knew of any minority frictions. The Soviet Jews who worked with us were very circumspect, and never revealed any more than their non-Jewish fellow workers. Other minorities were certainly present, but all we knew about them was little more than that they existed.

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Religion

15. Most of the churches in Leningrad had been converted into stores of various kinds. The few churches which remained, therefore, were always crowded. [redacted] did not go to church, but heard about such things [redacted]. There were no churches in the Moscow Rayon of Leningrad, since it was a newly developed district, and the closest church was a 30-40 minute trolley ride away. From what our friends told us, no particular age or sex group attended church in greater numbers than any other group. None of the Soviets we knew ever expressed themselves on religion.

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25X1XCrime and Corruption

16. Stealing seemed to be the greatest crime. Young, unescorted girls were often relieved of their purses. There was a great amount of pilfering by young boys and men in the department stores. There were a great many pickpockets. We heard of people being robbed in broad daylight on a busy street. [redacted] was pinioned between two men in the streetcar one day as they attempted to take his wallet. The streetcar conductor saw this, but waited until the two men had left before she asked if anything had been stolen from him. Salesgirls in the stores were afraid to accost thieves because thieves carried knives, and knowing that they would get 20 years in Siberia if caught, they did not hesitate to use any means to keep from getting caught. The people knew this too, so they turned their heads when they saw something happening. Oddly enough, when a young thief was caught, the people often tried to make the police officer let him go, since everyone knew that the culprit would get at least 20 years in Siberia. Stores and warehouses were often broken into, but we never heard of anyone being apprehended.

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Public Opinion

17. I never heard of anyone publicly opposing the present regime, either by active or passive resistance. The people seemed to accept Party line. However, people never seemed to be too excited about the glories and successes of the Communist regime, perhaps because they were too busy earning their daily bread. On holidays, however, when there were speeches and parties, extra rations, free time, etc., which were welcomed, everyone got into the spirit of the thing. The average person grumbled, but not in the same sense as a Western-oriented person would. People thought that prices were too high, but that they would decline; that there were not enough goods in the stores, but that the situation would improve; that there wasn't enough living space, but that that, too, would improve. The status quo was the fault of the "Anglo-American imperialists". The Soviets were particularly proud of the great Soviet war victories. They felt proud also of the great achievements in building which had taken place in the USSR over the last few years. Naturally, the "Anglo-American imperialist war agitators" were the cause of the present East-West tensions. The average Soviet was always willing to discuss the cause of the present conditions in the USSR, i.e., the USA was responsible because of its war agitation. The average Soviet was not informed on such things as the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the EDC. The average Soviet was certain that a new war would come, that it would be between the USSR and the USA, and that the USSR would win it. They heard from the press that in Korea the South Koreans attacked first. All felt that Communism would win a quick victory. The Soviets all believed the charge that the USA was using bacteriological warfare.

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